

## A Social-Scientific Reading of Hebrews 13:11–14 from a Postcolonial Milieu<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

This essay demonstrates that matters of social disparity, stemming from colonization, within a South African context can be addressed by a social-scientific reading of Hebrews 13:11–14. Social-scientific criticism is concerned with laying bare the cultural and social influences upon a text in the ancient world. It is a hermeneutical approach that brings the ancient and the contemporary into dialogue by providing a pool of shared pre-suppositions that enhance the apprehension of meaning, while safeguarding the modern reader from the merely subjective. This article's central thesis advances a tension in the understanding of the Christ who suffered "outside the camp" and the social reengineering that results in the communities born of his crucifixion. Like the movement from Leviticus 16 to Hebrews 13:11–14<sup>2</sup> a movement from Hebrews 13:11–14 to modern South African society is qualified, presenting redemptive parallels in a continuum that ultimately addresses South African social ills when "outside the camp" is read from a postcolonial vantage point.

### 1. Introduction

In Hebrews 13:11–14 the preacher<sup>2</sup> develops analogies from the Old Testament Levitical ritual of *Yom Kippur* (Leviticus 16) as he reinvigorates a faith community to continued solidarity with the Christ who suffered "outside the camp." This

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2 I will be referring to the author/preacher of Hebrews in the masculine based on the evidence of Heb 11:32, where the masculine suffix in the participle *diēgoumenon* is employed.

community's marginal existence in an imperial society<sup>3</sup> will inform my analysis of the stated text, resulting in a consideration of the postcolonial context. This essay contends that postcolonialism is a present-day reality, and not a bygone social ill.<sup>4</sup> Although postcolonialism has a global reach, this article will restrict itself to South Africa in matters of application. Methodologically, social-science models based in a sociology of knowledge will be employed before viable application, pertinent to South Africa, is extrapolated from the text. Through this approach, this article aims to safeguard against the pitfalls of anachronistic interpretation by demonstrating that social-scientific criticism is a cross-cultural exercise that respects the hermeneutical distance between the author, the original audience, and the contemporary South African church participating in the broader mission of God.

## 2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

### 2.1 Social-scientific criticism

Social-scientific criticism is concerned with laying bare the cultural and social influences upon a text in the ancient world. It is a hermeneutical approach that brings the ancient and the contemporary into dialogue by providing a pool of shared presuppositions that enhance the apprehension of meaning.<sup>5</sup> It is precisely because of this implied intercultural activity, latent within this methodological approach, that Jonker and Arendse define social-scientific criticism as a method that “stresses the indispensable significance of analyzing the interaction between the biblical text and the socio-cultural world in which it was first produced.”<sup>6</sup> Like most approaches in Bible interpretation, social-scientific criticism does not stand removed from other methodologies. Affinities between social-scientific criticism and the historical-critical approaches do exist. However, where historical-critical approaches are driven by questions such as “when?,” “what?,” “who?,” and “where?,” vis-à-vis doctrine and experience, social-scientific models are preoccupied with the “how?” and the “why?”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, social-scientific criticism is by its very nature multi-faceted, rendering it a worthy candidate for “hybridization”

3 Although the location and dating of the text are inconclusive, the second half of the first-century CE seems a plausible range. It is in this broad context that argumentation for an imperial context, ranging from Nero (pre-64 CE) to the Flavian dynasty (69–96 CE), seems likely, based mainly on the reference in Heb 13:24.

4 Laura E. Donaldson, “Postcolonialism and Biblical Reading: An Introduction,” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 5.

5 David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Hebrews in Social Scientific Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2012); T. Schmeller, “Sociology and New Testament Studies,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation K-Z*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 487.

6 Louis J. Jonker and Roger Arendse, “Approaches Focusing on the Production of Texts,” *Fishing for Jonah (anew): Various approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Louis J. Jonker and Douglas L. Lawrie (Stellenbosch: SunPress, 2005), 49.

7 Ibid., 50.

in the broader universe of Bible interpretation.<sup>8</sup> Arguably, this emerges from the fact that the approach is informed by multiple factors that shaped biblical texts, based on their function within the ancient world. Such factors include politics, economics, language, social systems, and customs; this justifies the multiple layers the approach uses to investigate meaning.

Social description, social history, the sociology of knowledge, and social-science models constitute overlapping pillars in the methodological tool box that the social-scientific interpreter draws from.<sup>9</sup> These pillars do not stand in isolation but are made to interact.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the reason behind such crossover could be ascribed to the fact that ancient societies are not unitary, nor even binary, in constitution. They are neither homogenous nor uniform in ideology, language, or composition. Rhoads alludes to this reality by suggesting:

The New Testament is a profoundly social document. Each writing in the New Testament emerged from a community. Each writing addressed specific people with a unique message for a given time, place, and circumstance . . . . The writings of the New Testament were social acts.

Our reading of the New Testament is also a social act.<sup>11</sup>

With the above in mind, how can social-scientific criticism be employed in a reading of Heb 13:11–14? What element of this broad methodology is most suited to the interpretation of the text and why?

## 2.2 *Hebrews 13 and social-scientific criticism*

The peroration (or conclusion)<sup>12</sup> of the letter to the Hebrews (13:1–21)<sup>13</sup> is composed of admonitions strung together in an exhortatory style. These admonitions collectively describe the communal implications of life under the new covenant,

8 Thomas Schmeller, "Sociology and New Testament Studies," *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation K–Z*, 487.

9 On this, see Jonker and Arendse, "Production of Texts," 48; and Naomi Steinberg, "Social-Scientific Criticism," in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation K–Z*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 478–79.

10 Schmeller, "Sociology and New Testament Studies," 490.

11 David Rhoads, "Social Criticism: Crossing Boundaries," in *Mark and Method: New Approaches to Biblical Studies*, ed. Janice C. Anderson and Stephen D. Moore (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 135.

12 Koester states that "'Peroration' is the term for the conclusion of a speech, according to the canons of classical rhetoric . . . the peroration gave the speaker a final opportunity to influence the listeners by reviewing key arguments and appealing to the emotions." Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 554. I delimit the peroration in Hebrews as running from 13:1–21. Koester, however, sees it running from 12:28–13:21.

13 This work advocates harmony between 13:1–12 and 13:13 based on the thematic and stylistic continuity between the two sections.

made ever more vivid by the hortatory subjunctive<sup>14</sup> (13:13), which encourages identification with Jesus's suffering "outside the camp" (13:11–13). In Hebrews, the Son's superiority to angels (1:1–5), to Moses (3:1–6), to the Levitical cultus (chaps. 7–10), along with the encomium of faith (11:1–40), course the length of an oration culminating in practical injunctions for the community born of his crucifixion (13:13).

From the Patristic era until the late eighteenth century,<sup>15</sup> Hebrews was regarded as a somewhat "enigmatic epistle" because of its typical epistolary ending (13:18–25), which stands at sharp odds with the preamble (1:1–4).<sup>16</sup> Those who regarded Hebrews as an unusual epistle relied on its placement within the Pauline corpus to support their position. Nevertheless, evidence from 13:22, specifically the phrase "word of exhortation," demonstrates that this text is not an epistle on the order of Paul's works, but a homily laden with rhetorical prowess.<sup>17</sup> In an attempt to undermine this, some scholars called into question the integrity of chapter 13.<sup>18</sup> In response, Attridge states that "suspicions about the integrity of Hebrews, and especially of chap. 13, are unfounded."<sup>19</sup> Thiselton is even more direct: "the vocabulary and especially the key themes which relate closely to issues which would face a pilgrim orientation argue for the integrity of the entire epistle."<sup>20</sup> In light of the unitary nature of Hebrews, this article divides chapter 13 as follows:<sup>21</sup>

1. PERORATION: 13:1–21
  - 1.1 Ethical injunctions: 13:1–6
  - 1.2 Examples to follow: 13:7–8
  - 1.3 The true Christian sacrifices: 13:9–16
  - 1.4 Submission to guides: 13:17
  - 1.5 Request for prayer: 13:18
  - 1.6 Benediction: 13:20–21
2. FINAL GREETINGS: 13:22–25

14 Heb 4:11, 16; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1, 22 demonstrate the preacher's widespread use of this rhetorical device, suggesting a deliberate and learned employment of the tool.

15 In 1797 J. Berger introduced a view that diverged with the traditional assumption. This view regarded Hebrews to be a sermon. See Koester, *Hebrews*, 80.

16 See Koester, *Hebrews*, 80; and Harold W. Attridge, "Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary H–J*, ed. David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 98.

17 See Gareth L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 15; and Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 2.

18 Buchanan (1967, p.267) cited in Anthony C. Thiselton, "Hebrews," in *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*, ed. James D. G. Dunn and John W. Rogerson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 1453, claims that "Ch. 13 is an addition prepared for a different group. . . . The benediction [13:20–21] and 'Pauline' postscript [vv. 22–25] may have been added." See, Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 384–85, for a more developed layout of the matter.

19 Attridge, "Hebrews," 98.

20 Thiselton, "Hebrews," 1453.

21 These headings are borrowed from F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 367–92; and Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 384–410.

Having established the structure of Hebrews 13, and how it relates to what precedes it, it becomes imperative to substantiate the relevance of the social-scientific methodology for this study. First, an emphasis on ancient Israel and the Levitical cultus (vis-à-vis Lev 16) is underscored, as part of a contrast between the antiquated and the new covenant community (13:11–12). Second, the preacher is primarily addressing the new covenant community that was negotiating the realities of exclusion in the context of first-century imperial society (13:12–13). Third, the eschatological motif of the city to come is advanced by the homily (13:14), thus signalling a new symbolic universe. This theme also encourages allegiance from adherents (13:15). The implied communal motif, underscored by the movement of symbols from Leviticus 16 to the new covenant community and the eschatological city, warrants social hermeneutical inquiry, specifically, an investigation via a sociology of knowledge, which is a sub-category of social-scientific criticism.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike other branches of social-scientific criticism, a sociology of knowledge goes beyond describing the social order, and involves the reconstruction of the worldview of a given group as it functioned in the world and the symbols that were employed to police its continuity. Rhoads puts it as follows: “Whereas social description focuses on the material realities of a society, sociology of knowledge deals with how that society organizes and interprets those realities.”<sup>23</sup>

### *2.3 Honour and shame, challenge-riposte, and patron-broker-client relations*

#### *2.3.1 Honour and shame*

In the ancient world, honour was a limited and highly-prized commodity. What honour one possessed was always taken from another, either through “challenge-riposte,” or inheritance/birth.<sup>24</sup> Malina calls these “acquired” honour and “ascribed” honour, respectively.<sup>25</sup> It was of grave importance to retain honour, since gaining honour (through challenge-riposte) to move up the rungs of social standing was a reality that preoccupied nearly every first-century Mediterranean citizen. Evidently, this rendered the undertones of social interaction somewhat competitive. The antonym reality of “shame” also held true, and on this matter Cockerill comments:

It was crucial to have a sense of what was shameful since a person’s identity and reputation were closely identified with the honor and recognition given one for appropriately fulfilling his or her place

<sup>22</sup> See Rhoads, “Social Criticism,” 139.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 370.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 32–33.

in society. Furthermore, one shared the honor—or shame—of one's social group. Thus it was honorable to act in such a way that one protected the honor and public approval of those groups to which one belonged.<sup>26</sup>

Worth noting here is Crook's evaluation of the individualistic focus and description of honour and shame, as advanced by Malina (and Cockerill).<sup>27</sup> Crook demonstrates that Malina's description, while accurate in underscoring honour and shame as pivotal values in social interactions within the ancient Mediterranean world, was neither defined nor regulated by the individual. Arguably, such an individualistic approach is anachronistic, deviating from the collective nature of the ancient Mediterranean milieu. It is precisely because of this that Crook remarks: "In defining honour, we should not start with focus on the individual. We should, rather, start with the focus on the collectivistic PCR [Public Court of Reputation]. When this is accomplished, the PCR becomes the first, last, and only arbiter of honourable and shameful behaviour."<sup>28</sup>

This is not the only aspect of Malina's description of honour and shame that has been negatively critiqued. The view that women in the ancient world were inherently shameful compared to men, and that their honour was linked to their chastity and modesty, has also been challenged. Among those antagonistic to this claim is Wikan, who states:

Would anyone seriously maintain that a woman cannot gain value in her own and other's eyes, and that this is a male prerogative? Moreover, does it seem plausible that men should regard a woman's value as wholly dependent upon her sexual conduct, so that if she misbehaves, she has no value at all and that women's ideas on this point should be identical with those of men? Such extraordinary assertions could only arise from the anthropologist's failure to observe the range of contexts and processes within which persons are granted honour, in different circles and sectors of a society (including its 50 per cent. of female members!).<sup>29</sup>

In light of such distinctions in critique of the traditional view, this paper aligns itself with Crook and Wikan in their respective use and description of the ancient couplet of "honour and shame." It is the *community* that ascribes and regulates

26 Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 18.

27 Zeba A. Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125.3 (2009): 598–99.

28 *Ibid.*, 599.

29 Unni Wikan, "Shame and Honour: A Contestable Pair," *Man* 19 (1984): 639.

honour, and this honour is broader, and more nuanced and complex, than a mere linear, reductionistic, and chauvinistic ascription.

### 2.3.2 *Patrons, brokers, and clients*

This paper upholds the view that a culture of honour and shame was widely prevalent in the first-century Greco-Roman world, albeit nuanced depending on locale. Generally, for those seeking honour beyond their station, honour independent of “challenge-riposte,” the auspices of a broker were sought after.<sup>30</sup> Malina and Rohrbaugh point out:

Patron-client systems are socially fixed relations of generalized reciprocity between social unequals in which a lower-status person (called a client) has his needs met by having recourse for favors to a higher-status, well situated person (called a patron).<sup>31</sup>

Malina and Rohrbaugh go on to explain that brokers usually mediated between patrons and clients, benefiting the latter with patronage and the former with praise that further enhanced their honour status.<sup>32</sup> However, the manner in which a patron responded to a request for patronage could render them honourable or shameful. Similarly, laxness in displaying loyalty or public orations of praise towards a patron could render a client shameful.<sup>33</sup>

Sweeping across the New Testament is the presentation of God as ultimate Patron from whom all grace proceeds,<sup>34</sup> a point deSilva develops regarding Hebrews. He explains: “The author presents what the audience has received as a result of joining the Christian community, what they’ve experienced as part of this community, and what they’ve been *told* they’ve received (but of which they have no first-hand experience) all as gifts and privileges bestowed upon them by God, their divine patron.”<sup>35</sup>

Linked to God’s patronage is the role of Christ as the ultimate mediator or broker (2:17–18 and 4:14–5:10) of grace.<sup>36</sup> When Hebrews is read through this lens, we learn that the preacher sought to revitalize his audience’s confidence (10:35–36) by appealing to their shame, a shame imposed by wider society (10:33; cf. 12:1–3), which he reverses and reinterprets as honour in the eyes of God, their Patron (cf. 2:17b). Concerning the public’s role in imposing shame, deSilva states: “The public imposition of disgrace constituted a principal strategy for the exercise

30 See Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 18.

31 Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 388.

32 Ibid, 389.

33 Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 18.

34 Cf. Heb 3:5–6 and 4:16.

35 deSilva, *Hebrews*, 96; emphasis original.

36 Heb 4:14–16, 6:19–20, 7:26–28, 8:6, 9:15, and 12:24. Cf. Mark 1:40–45, 2:5, 2:10, 3:13–19, 5:6–7, 10:35–45, 10:47, and 11:9–10.

of social control. The members of the larger society were attempting to ‘correct’ what they perceived as deviant knowledge and deviant behaviour in their midst, and to dissuade others from being attracted to this group.”<sup>37</sup>

This grave reality is also observed by Thompson, who sees the alienation of the house church from the wider Greco-Roman world, motivated by the public’s disgruntlement with their contrasting value system, among other things.<sup>38</sup> To combat the disillusionment that ensued from the host society’s critique, the preacher revisits the benefits received by the new covenant community, while reminding them of God’s patronage. This patronage, unlike any other, secured for them eternal graces mediated by the suffering and shame of God’s eternal broker, Christ, “outside the camp” (13:13).

The preacher to the Hebrews is, however, not motivated by individual acquisitions of honour, but by the communal, as evidenced by the use of multiple hortatory subjunctives,<sup>39</sup> and the development of broader motifs ranging from Israel to the new covenant community. It is therefore worthwhile underscoring that both divine patronage and divine brokerage are used as socio-rhetorical strategies, addressing the community rather than the individual per se.

It can be seen then, that “honour” and “shame,” “patron-client” relations, and “challenge-riposte” were pivotal in the interactions between the homily’s audience and their host society. Ironically, it is these universal social values that brought them suffering and shame,<sup>40</sup> thus motivating the preacher to deliver a homily that functioned as an apologetic to reawaken confidence in the Christ, whose shame “outside the camp” serves as a gateway to eternal glory, which is true honour.

### 3. A Social-Scientific Analysis of Hebrews 13:11–14

#### 3.1 *Hebrews 13:11: The Christ and the high priest*

Hebrews 2:17 is the homily’s first association of Christ with the high priestly role, a theme that recurs in 3:1, 4:14–15, 5:1–10, 6:20, 7:1, 7:26–8:3, 9:7, 11, 25, and 13:11. Cockerill asserts that “the pastor never compares Christ with contemporary Judaism but with the institutions of the Old Covenant and priestly system as described in the Pentateuch.”<sup>41</sup> However, complex as this may be, the office of high priest is one that undergirds the development of various Christological motifs spanning the length of the ancient sermon.<sup>42</sup> One of these is explicated in chapter 5,

37 deSilva, *Hebrews*, 48–49.

38 James W. Thompson, “Insider Ethics for Outsiders: Ethics for Aliens in Hebrews,” *Restoration Quarterly* 53.4 (2011), 209.

39 Heb 4:11, 16; 10:22, 23, 24; 12:1, 22.

40 See Heb 10:32–34.

41 Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 21.

42 David A. deSilva, “Letter to the Hebrews,” *The New Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible D–H*, ed. Katharine D. Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 783.



where Psalms 2:7 and 110:4 are amalgamated to advance both abasement through suffering and Christ's subsequent exaltation.<sup>43</sup> Although this advances the very abasement of the Christ to serve the purposes of the homily's argument, it does so in reversal to the trajectory of Psalm 110:4, which is not abased, but transcendent.

Another theme closely related to the mention of the high priest in Hebrews is that of Melchizedek,<sup>44</sup> an enigmatic Old Testament figure, who, apart from Hebrews, is only mentioned in Genesis 14:17–20 and Psalm 110:4. Unlike priests in the Levitical order, established and regulated by the Torah, the author presents Melchizedek as one appointed to office by divine edict in Hebrews 7:16–17. Added to this, Melchizedek is presented in Hebrews 7:17 as one with no successor, a sharp contrast to the Aaronic order (of which the Levitical priests were a part). The uniqueness of this figure in relation to the Levitical order is summarised by Cortez, who states that “the transition from the old to the new covenant implies a transition from *many* to *one* priest . . . . This transition from many to one priest implies a transition from *many* sacrifices to *one*.”<sup>45</sup>

Leviticus 16:27 reads, “The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides flesh and intestines are to be burned.” When Leviticus 16:27 is read with Hebrews 13:11 it is evident that the latter loosely employs the former to explain the ritual of *Yom Kippur*.<sup>46</sup> However, a striking difference between the two is that the priest is not mentioned in Leviticus 16:27, but is mentioned as the one responsible for bringing the blood of animal sacrifices into the holy places in Hebrews 13:11. In Leviticus 16:27 the one responsible for taking these animals outside the camp is an unnamed man who stands distinct to the Levitical priest. By noting this loose association with the facts of the Levitical text, one may conclude that the preacher is reinterpreting *Yom Kippur* in light of Christ's death and priesthood, and is more concerned with implications of the latter than the former.

### 3.2 Hebrews 13:12–13: The Christ and “outside the camp”

Hebrews 13:12 completes a comparative parallel between “outside the camp”/ “outside the gate” and “animals”/ “Jesus” that begins in 13:11. Regarding the former pairing, Koester comments: “The Israelite camp was arranged in concentric rings of holiness. . . . Unclean things were taken outside its boundaries (Exod

43 Attridge, “Hebrews,” 101.

44 Heb 5:6, 5:10, 6:20, 7:1, 7:10, 11, 7:15, and 7:17.

45 Felix H. Cortez, “From the Holy to the Most Holy Place: The Period of Hebrews 9:6–10 and the Day of Atonement as a Metaphor of Transition,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125.3 (2006), 543.

46 Attridge, *Hebrews*, 397.

29:14, Lev 9:11, and 16:27).<sup>47</sup> This point is elucidated by the later (third Century CE) Mishnah (*Kelim* 1:6–9), which claims:

- 1) The land of Israel is holier than any other land
- 2) The walled cities of Israel are still more holy
- 3) Within the walls of Jerusalem is still more holy
- 4) The Temple Mount is the more holy
- 5) The rampart is still more holy
- 6) The Court of Women is still more holy
- 7) The Court of the Israelites is still more holy
- 8) The Court of Priests is still more holy
- 9) Between the porch and altar is still more holy
- 10) The Holy of Holies is still more holy

Notable here are the concentric circles of holiness, together with the increased sense of holiness, in a movement towards the inner chamber of the tabernacle/temple.<sup>48</sup> These concentric circles not only function as determinants of “geographical holiness” but also serve to underscore the rungs of honour held by different citizens. In contrast to the above, Cockerill reinterprets these circles in relation to “outside the camp”: Inside and outside the gate are both conditions of life in this world. The first is the place for worldly security and acceptance for those who reject Christ. The second is the place of Christ’s crucifixion and thus the place of rejection by the unbelieving world that despised him.<sup>49</sup>

It is clear that the phrase “outside the camp” evokes the imagery of Leviticus 16 while at the same time alluding to a point of significance in its employment, that is, the impurity associated with all the happenings that occur outside the borders of holiness, as defined by the establishment. From Hebrews 13:11, we note that “outside” invites the believing community to “enter” it as they “follow the path pioneered by the Son through suffering to glory.”<sup>50</sup>

When Christ’s suffering “outside the camp,” a suffering that leads to his death, is juxtaposed with that of the new covenant community, clear continuity between the head of the sectarian movement and his followers is established. Hebrews 13:13 says, “and bear the reproach he endured,” indicating a communal identity wrought of Christ’s shame (see 12:2). Here, a sociology of knowledge would bring into focus the social dynamics surrounding crucifixion, by demonstrating how it was viewed in the ancient world. Malina and Rohrbaugh say that “New

47 Koester, *Hebrews*, 570.

48 Ibid., 120. Although these gradations of holiness do not quite match the structure of the tabernacle or the temple in ancient Israel (which, for example, had no Court of Women), the general idea of a gradation of holiness is found across different interpretive epochs.

49 Cockerill, *Hebrews*, 700.

50 deSilva, “Hebrews,” 783.

Testament authors reflect the general perception of crucifixion in the Greco-Roman world as shame . . . the crucifixion process was marked by a progressive public humiliation and deprivation of honor.”<sup>51</sup> The stripping away of honour can be correlated to the journey outside the city gates, which as seen in *Kelim* 1:6–9, is a place of pollution and abundant shame. Malina and Rohrbaugh expand on this by giving a subjective view in relation to the PCR:

The real test of the victim, in the Mediterranean context, was not in the brutal pain itself, but rather in the endurance of pain and suffering, as a mark of *andreia*, manly courage. Silence of the victim during torture proved his honor. And yet the loss of honor evidenced by the whole process and inability to defend one’s honor were deemed far worse than the physical pain involved.<sup>52</sup>

The recurrent theme of “enduring suffering” hinges on Christ’s suffering (see Heb 2:9, 2:10, 2:18, 5:8; 10:32, and 11:36). Through this suffering, the believing community stands at odds with its host society, because of its resocialization at the primary level. It is from a place of shame and abasement that the new covenant community is born. And it is from this abased virtue that it launches into the *missio Dei*, as underscored in Hebrews 13:12.

### 3.3 Hebrews 13:14: *The Christ and the lasting city*

Hebrews 13:14 reads: “For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” Koester suggests that the “city” they “do not have” here is Rome,<sup>53</sup> a point corroborated by Whitlark.<sup>54</sup> If this is the case then the encouragement given by the author functions as quasi-subversive propaganda within an imperial setting, undermining what is regarded as eternal via the introduction of an eschatological motif reminiscent of the motivation in Hebrews 12:22. Whitlark gives greater insight on the comparison of the cities alluded to by suggesting:

Hebrews 13:13–14 then appears to argue against the temptation for people to assimilate back into the imperial culture and the relief and prosperity such identification offered. . . . The draw to identify with Rome and its claims seems to stem from the fear of imperial reprisals for the community’s Christian confession. Thus, the movement of the exhortation in vv. 13–14 is a movement from

51 Malina and Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary*, 346.

52 Ibid., 347.

53 Koester, *Hebrews*, 571.

54 Jason A. Whitlark, “Here We Do Not Have a City That Remains: A Figured Critique of Roman Imperial Propaganda in Hebrews 13:14,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 131.1 (2012): 172.

identification with Rome and its claims to identification with Jesus, his present shame, and the glory of God's future promise.<sup>55</sup>

Here, the oppressive power of the empire, also alluded to in 10:32–39, cannot be ignored, especially when juxtaposed with Hebrews 13:14. Thompson stresses that “[t]he marginalization of the community is analogous to the experience of others who lived outside the dominant culture.”<sup>56</sup> Of importance here is the encouragement given by the author to “maintain communal solidarity as it experiences abuse from the outside world.”<sup>57</sup> In light of postcolonial discourse, and a sociology of knowledge, the solidarity encouraged could be regarded as intra-textual opposition to the empire as the community endures shame and pain while inhabiting an alternate symbolic reality.

#### 4. Appropriating Hebrews 13:11–14 in a Postcolonial Milieu

##### 4.1 Postcolonial discourse

Dube Shomanah says the term postcolonial “is used to cover all the culture affected by imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day.”<sup>58</sup> Commenting on Orientalism, Donaldson alerts students of postcolonial theory to the dissemination into the discursive of what was historically a political enterprise. This is seen in the manner in which this ideology engages in “*resistance* to . . . colonialist ideologies, and their contemporary forms and subjectificatory legacies.”<sup>59</sup> This exposes the need to freshly define the term postcolonial, since its effects continue to exist in a new paradigm. Segovia provides a worthy nuance to the term as follows: “[postcolonialism] is a field of studies that is by no means monolithic but rather highly diverse and conflicted, so that even the definition of the term ‘postcolonial’ emerges as not at all unproblematic.”<sup>60</sup> This amplifies the obligation to provide a working description of postcolonial reading. According to Dube’s characterization, a postcolonial reading is:

not a discourse of historical accusations, but a committed search and struggle for decolonization and liberation of the oppressed. In terms of classification, it refers to a complex collection of texts that are brought, born, and used in imperial settings, to legitimate, resist, or collaborate with imperialism. While this definition is an umbrel-

55 Ibid., 176.

56 Thompson, “Insider Ethics,” 210.

57 Ibid., 219.

58 Musa W. Dube Shomanah, “Postcolonial Bible Interpretations,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation K–Z*, ed. John H. Hayes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 299.

59 Donaldson, “Postcolonialism,” 3; emphasis original.

60 Fernando F. Segovia, “Mapping the Postcolonial Optic in Biblical Criticism: Meaning and Scope,” *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism: Interdisciplinary Intersections*, ed. Stephen D. Moore and Fernando F. Segovia (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 25.

la term that includes the texts of the colonizer and the colonized, the phrase “colonial discourse” is also used to distinguish the former from the latter. . . . As an umbrella term, a post-colonial approach is best understood as a complex myriad of methods and theories which study a wide range of texts and their participation in the making or subversion of imperialism.<sup>61</sup>

Sugirtharajah corroborates Dube’s understanding by asserting that “postcolonialism is about . . . confronting the after-effects of imperial and the new effect of neo-imperial control.”<sup>62</sup> From Dube, we note the subversive nature of postcolonial ideology and the inherent drive to grant liberty to the “shackled” other,<sup>63</sup> all within historic, text-bound, or contemporary imperial paradigms.<sup>64</sup> Dube comments elsewhere that the postcolonial is about “challenging all readers and writers to examine their practices for imperial and colonial currents of domination and suppression.”<sup>65</sup> Concerning the historic and text-bound, Brett observes that this decolonization is embracing of all literary fields, including the biblical. He says that “there is no reason to exclude the study of ancient colonial relationships within which the bulk of biblical material was produced. . . . We should all confess that much biblical interpretation, ancient and modern, has been enabled or constrained by imperialist social systems,”<sup>66</sup> which is a view shared by Berquist.<sup>67</sup>

Unlike the statements of the commentators above, this article’s motivation is concerned not primarily with the history behind the text, but with what is in front of the text, namely, the postcolonial South African experience. Arguably, this approach retains the uniqueness of the Christian message and ethos, and encourages the church to continue participating in the mission of God in a contextually attentive manner. This it does by avoiding conflation or continuity with extra-Christian creeds, which, coincidentally, mirrors the very thrust of the hortatory injunction in Hebrews 13:11–14. Like the first-century sectarian Christian community, which was shamed by its host society but honoured by God, the church in South Africa is invited to exist in a social tension. This tension involves the church concertedly identifying with shame in order to be honoured by God, while advocating God as the ultimate Patron of grace.

61 Musa Dube, “Toward a Post-Colonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible,” *Semeia* 78 (1997): 15.

62 R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Exploring Postcolonial Biblical Criticism* (Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 14.

63 Sharon H. Ringe, “When Women Interpret the Bible,” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville: John Knox, 1998), 4.

64 Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Biblical Criticism*, 14.

65 Dube Shomanah, “Postcolonial Bible Interpretations,” 299.

66 Mark G. Brett, “The Ethics of Postcolonial Criticism,” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 219.

67 Jon L. Berquist, “Postcolonialism and Imperial Motives for Canonization,” *Semeia* 75 (1996): 26.

#### 4.2 Hebrews 13:11–14 and the South African postcolonial reality

South Africa is awash with vestiges of the colonial reality, ranging from chronic socio-economic disparity<sup>68</sup> to socio-political volatility.<sup>69</sup> In an article titled, “Pan-Africanism is More Important than Ever,” Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, the chairperson to the African Union Commission, says, “We should look at [African Renaissance] as a process not as an event. It has to start with liberation because you can’t have a renaissance of a people who are repressed.”<sup>70</sup> This comment indicates that economic independence is the next phase of liberation within the postcolonial African discourse. Furthermore, with Christianity’s locus migrating from the West to the Global South, questions arise in an analysis of texts such as Hebrews 13:11–14. These questions include: What is the author-intended meaning of these verses? What does a Christocentric meaning of the text look like for the church participating in the *missio Dei* in a society grossly affected by socio-economic disparity?

With South Africa labelled one of the most socially unequal countries in the world, holding a Gini coefficient of between 0.63 and 0.7,<sup>71</sup> it is a major contention of this essay that a reading of Hebrews 13:11–14 must not only speak to salvation received, but also to salvation expressed, bringing about the transformation of social strata, even in the socio-economic. By its very nature, socio-economic disparity contributes to the stratification of society, a synchronic parallel to the organisation of the first-century Jewish world, as described earlier in this article.

According to Oxfam, this stratification is the bedrock of social incoherence,<sup>72</sup> a point Pope Francis corroborates by saying, “Inequality is the root of social evil.”<sup>73</sup> For the church in South Africa, when participating in the *missio Dei* in light of such social reality and commentary, it becomes imperative to answer the pragmatic question of how we appropriate Hebrews 13:11–14 in our context.

First, the solidarity Hebrews 13:11–14 prompts the question of how this solidarity can establish an authentic alternative community around the person of Christ in South Africa. Here Volf provides insightful commentary:

As the Gospel has been preached to many nations, the church has taken root in many cultures, changing them as well as being profoundly shaped by them. Yet the many churches in diverse cultures are one, just as the triune God is one. No church in a given culture

68 Oxfam, *An Economy for the 1%* (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2016).

69 Mamphela Ramphela, *Conversations with My Sons and Daughters* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2012), 117.

70 Elissa Jobson and Parselelo Kantai, “Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma: Pan-Africanism is More Important than Ever,” *The Africa Report* 50 (2013): 27.

71 Oxfam, *Even It Up: Time to End Extreme Inequality* (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2014), 38.

72 Ibid., 49.

73 Pope Francis, cited in Oxfam, *Even It Up*, 49.

may isolate itself from other churches in other cultures declaring itself sufficient to itself and to its own culture.<sup>74</sup>

Volf's comments implicitly point to the diversity latent in genuine catholicity. This diversity is not limited to matters of ethnicity and culture, but extends to socio-economic realities as well. Evidently, a South African church that harnesses these virtues in ethos and practice is going "outside the camp" as described by Hebrews 13:11–14 and Ephesians 2:11–22. In going "outside the camp," a counter-current motion, obedient to the injunction of the preacher to the Hebrews, is continued in a postcolonial context, transcending (yet informed by) overt cultural distinctions.

Second, Hebrews 13:11–14 calls for focus towards the enduring city. However, in focusing on the enduring city, the social injunctions of Hebrews 13 portray the tension all Christ-centred communities experience. This eschatological tension can function as an instrument of hope for communities at the bitter end of the poles of disparity, by alleviating present ills with a healthy proclamation of future grace. Added to hope, this motif can also function as an instrument of warning for the privileged members of the new covenant community, anticipating as it does the return of the Christ and the coming new heavens and new earth (Rev 21–22). It does this by drawing attention to the eschatological reward implied in the warning passages in Hebrews (2:1–4; 3:6–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39). The responsibility of the rich to aid the poor, especially within the new covenant community, is boldly underscored in the wider New Testament corpus (see Jas 5:7–12), and can be qualified by a social-scientific reading. Furthermore, the dual motif of "hope and judgment," within an eschatological paradigm, is not foreign to Hebrews as seen in the warning passages.

Third, the ethics of defining who is "in" and who is "out" based on shared principles is fundamental to the participation and success of the enterprise. Such an approach, though necessary to the identity of any contemporary Christian group, does not mean that the group remains insulated from the world without. Exclusion, for the church in South Africa, should function not as a defender of polarity, but a gateway to diversity and social-reengineering through the Gospel. Evidence of this can be seen in Hebrews 13:11–14, where the Christ inaugurates a new order through a reversal of the antiquated ethics of the Levitical, by his death outside the borders of the *status quo*. Here the contemporary church in South Africa is conditioned to the fact that socio-economic disparities are a reality that should not be limited to a historical consciousness, but should rather motivate a missional outworking, through practical engagement and collaborations across fields.

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74 Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 51.

## 5. Conclusion

This article has aimed to read Hebrews 13:11–14 using social-science approaches, for a postcolonial milieu. Matters of Christology, moving from the Levitical order to the Christ, may be drawn out from this text, to motivate the South African church to be ministers of the new creation in areas ravaged by legacies of colonialism. Furthermore, the understanding of holiness, as it functions in the Greco-Roman paradigms of honour and shame, demonstrates that the revision brought about by the Christ's suffering outside the camp are counter-cultural across interpretive epochs. With this understanding, the church in South Africa may be motivated to address matters of social disparity, latent in the postcolonial experience, by outworking Christ-centred solidarity with those in the margins in a way that does not patronise, but “goes outside the camp,” for the sake of eternal glory, a glory that is true honour.